

The 13 Principles of Faith

The principles

- Introduce the Rambam (1135-1204)
- Clean, rational, analytical mind (to excess?)
- Championed “creed” for Judaism: The 13 principles of faith (‘ikkarim)
[commentary on Sanhedrin 10]:

1. God exists and created everything
2. God is One
3. God has no body
4. God is eternal
5. God alone should be worshipped
6. God revealed Himself through the prophets
7. Moses was the greatest of prophets
8. The Torah we have today is the same as the one God gave us on Mount Sinai
9. The Torah will never change
10. God knows all our actions
11. God rewards good and punishes evil
12. The Messiah will come
13. The dead will be resurrected

- Comment on why each one is viewed as necessary

The effect

- Controversial when proposed (Hasdai Crescas and Joseph Albo: Is rest of Judaism less important?)
- Ignored by Jews for many centuries
- But today many traditional Jews consider them obligatory
- Main view: Judaism stresses action (commandments), not belief. Belief is not central, or even required, in Judaism.
- Siddur reflects uneasy compromise: ‘Ikkarim included only as two poetic restatements:

-**Yigdal** (Daniel ben Yehudah, 1404). Some Ashkenazim recite it at beginning of morning prayers. All frequently sing it at end of formal services (as in the Egypt of my childhood).

-**Ani maamin**. (Unknown). Optional reading following morning service (Shacharit) among some Ashkenazim. All lines begin with "Ani maamin be-emunah shlemah – I believe with perfect faith that..."

Popular tune for 12th principle (about Messiah) composed by Reb Azriel David, a Modzitzer Hasid, on the way to Treblinka:

Ani maamin be-emunah shlema beviat Ha-Mashiach, ve-af 'al pi sheyit-mahmecha, 'im kol zeh achakeh lo bechol yom sheyavo.

I believe with perfect faith in the coming of the Messiah, and even though he may delay, I await him every day with all that, certain that he will come.

-Artschroll siddur [1984; very Orthodox] introduces Ani Maamin as follows [p 242]:

Historically Judaism never separated belief from performance... However, philosophical speculation and dogmas of faith became prevalent among other religions and, in time, began to influence a number of Jews. To counteract this trend, medieval rabbinic authorities felt the need to define the principles of Judaism... [The Rambam's version] has achieved virtually universal acceptance. It is commendable to recite these principles every day after Shacharit.

-Reconstructionists built their system around action, explicitly shunning belief

-Rambam's "threat":

"When a man believes all of these principles, then he enters into the community of Israel... Even if he sins greatly... he is punished according to his sins but he still has a share in the World to Come and he is considered a sinning Jew. [But] if a man rejects [even] one of these principles, then he has left the nation... [and] is called a heretic."

YET

Talmud says a Jew remains a Jew no matter what [Sanhedrin 44a]:

R. Abba b. Zabda said: Even though [the people] have sinned, they are still 'Israel'

Midrash says God does not hold belief to be essential [Lamentations Rabbah, Prologue II]:

R. Huna and R. Jeremiah said in the name of R. Hiyya b. Abba: It is written [in Jeremiah], 'They have forsaken Me and have not kept My law' (Jer. 16:11) -- i.e. [God said] I wish they had forsaken Me but still kept My law, because by occupying themselves with it, the light which it contains would have led them back to the right path.

Disagreement with Rambam was not on whether his principles are correct but on whether their rejection brands one a heretic, which has serious halakhic implications.

-Clear Ashkenazic move to the right in modern times re principles.

Discussion: What is belief?

A warm fuzzy feeling in the tummy? How do you know if you have it?

-Niels Bohr: The horseshoe works whether or not you believe in it

-I can prove I believe in gravity (won't jump out window), but how can I prove I believe Moses parted the sea?

-Belief cannot be commanded

-Trust vs faith. Trust is diffuse, mostly a feeling. Faith is specific. Hebrew "emunah", usually translated as belief, really means trust, confidence, faithfulness.

-Rambam fell into the trap most other religions fell into: Adopting a creed. *Even if its tenets are generally accepted*, it should not be a litmus test. Only actions should. Your thoughts are your own.

-BUT: Messianics say they can observe all commandments and still "believe in Jesus". Is that OK? Practice suggests not, but does theory?

Possible conclusion

Shim'on, the son [of Rabban Gamliel], said: "All my days I have been raised among the Sages, and I have found nothing as good for the body as silence. The main thing is practice, not study, and whoever talks too much brings on sin. [Talmud, Pirke Avot 1:17]